

Nation Watch

Meet the new title holder

At 114, Emma Faust Tillman (seen with daughter Marjorie Tillman) of East Hartford, Conn., has just become the world's oldest person.

"There is no strategy. This is a pingpong game with American lives."

Sen. Chuck Hagel, Nebraska Republican, on President Bush's plan for a troop buildup in Iraq

DAY'S TOP 10

SENATORS TAKE ON BUSH

WASHINGTON | A day after President Bush asked Congress to give his Iraq troop buildup a chance to work, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to oppose it. | A1

COLD CASE CRACKS

MISSISSIPPI | A former sheriff's deputy and reputed Ku Klux Klan member previously believed to be dead has been found on kidnapping charges stemming from a crime 40 years ago. | A1

WHEN CHENEY SPOKE...

WASHINGTON | Vice President Dick Cheney so terrified government bureaucrats that they quickly coughed up the classified identity of a CIA spy when his White House aide demanded information about her husband, witnesses say. | A7

DEFICIT GAP NARROWS

WASHINGTON | Budget estimates released Wednesday showed a slight improvement in the deficit. | C2

HAVE YOU SEEN THE CHIP?

SCIENTISTS | Researchers have built a memory chip that is roughly the size of a white blood cell: about one-2,000th of an inch on a side. It is the densest ever made. The findings appear in this issue of the journal *Nature*.

E-COUNT WAS RIGGED

MAINE | Two election workers were convicted Wednesday of rigging a re-count of the 2004 presidential election in the state's most populous county.

IT'S A REAL RAY GUN

GEORGIA | The military calls its new weapon a "nonlethal directed energy weapon," but it's a ray gun that shoots a beam of light that makes people feel as if they are about to catch fire. The technology is supposed to be harmless — a nonlethal way to get enemies to drop their weapons.

KERRY'S OUT

WASHINGTON | Sen. John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who narrowly lost the presidency to President Bush in 2004, announced Wednesday that he would not proceed with a second bid for the White House. "We came close, but not close enough to be tempted to try again," Kerry said. | A7

DIDN'T DO ANYTHING'

GEORGIA | A state senator accused of groping a legislative aide testified Wednesday that the 18-year-old was like a live wire and that he saw nothing wrong with sharing a motel room with her. The Senate has accused Sen. Dan Sutton of sexual misconduct last February with the aide. Sutton was not charged Wednesday before a Senate special committee investigating the accusation.

MEDICINE DANGERS

FLORIDA | At least three babies have died after being given over-the-counter cough and cold medicines, more than 1,500 children needed treatment in hospital emergency rooms during 2004 and 2005, federal health officials said. All three infants had high levels of pseudoephedrine, a nasal decongestant, in their blood. Two also had dextromethorphan, a cough suppressant, and acetaminophen, a fever reliever, in their bodies.

PHOTO



RICH PEDRONCELLI | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

E FITNESS CHALLENGE

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger — still nursing a broken leg — visited Will C. Wood Middle School in Sacramento on Wednesday and announced a fitness challenge. Eighth-grader Tou Her shook hands.

REACTIONS

CONTAMINATED COMMUNITY | 'They want out tomorrow'

A TOWN GETS READY TO DIE

A federal buyout is arriving for residents of an undermined city near Kansas.

By MATTHEW C. WRIGHT
Special to The Washington Post

PICHER, Okla. | As they do almost every day, a few men gathered at a table in the back of the Picher Express, the last gas station in this onetime mining boomtown.

Conversation inevitably turns to the arrival of the appraisers, sent by the federal government as part of a voluntary buyout that will, in essence, mean the end of this city.

"If they don't give me enough, I'm not going nowhere," declared Clell Ware, who has lived in Picher all 72 years of his life. His friends around the table burst out laughing. They know that the buyout is likely to be the best offer they ever receive for their property.

"A lot of them talk," Country Girls Cafe owner Vickie Perrieman said later. "I imagine once they get that offer, they'll be gone. It's a reality thing."

Signs of impending death are everywhere in Picher, just across the state line from Kansas. Many stores along U.S. 69, the town's main street, are empty, their windows coated with a layer of grime, virtually concealing the abandoned merchandise still on display.

Trucks traveling along the highway are diverted around Picher for fear that the hollowed-out mines under the town would cause the streets to collapse under the weight of big rigs.

"It's like watching somebody that you love very much suffer a long, slow, painful death,"



MATTHEW C. WRIGHT | SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON POST

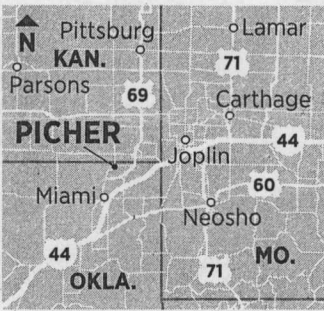
Giant gray piles of mining waste known as chat loom over the town of Picher, Okla., and the heavy metals they contain contaminate the air and groundwater.

said Kim Pace, a lifelong resident and principal of Picher-Cardin Elementary School. Even though "it's the right thing to do, and it needs to happen, you're not ready to give them up."

The culprits of Picher's demise are the same lead and zinc mines that brought the town its prosperity and boosted its population to a high of 16,000 before World War II.

But the mines were shut down in the 1970s, and all that is left in and around Picher are about 1,000 people and giant gray piles of mining waste, known locally as chat, some hundreds of feet tall and acres wide, that loom over abandoned storefronts and empty lots.

The piles are loaded with heavy metals that have contaminated the air and the groundwater and placed the northeastern Oklahoma town in the middle of the Tar Creek Superfund Site, the largest and one of the most polluted in the



THE KANSAS CITY STAR

country.

Abandoned mines beneath the city have collapsed, and a federal study has determined that more cave-ins are possible.

The study sealed Picher's fate, persuading Sen. James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican, former chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and now its ranking Republican, to drop his opposition to a federal buyout of the town. Before that, he supported funds for a cleanup.

Just how long the town will take to die is anyone's guess. The federal buyout of residents

is being done in two phases because only about \$20 million of the estimated \$40 million to \$50 million needed to complete the project has been appropriated.

Residents whose properties are at risk of caving in, along with the elderly, people with disabilities and businesses, are in Phase 1. They can expect official offers from the government as soon as Feb. 1. Phase 2 may take substantially longer.

In fact, local disagreements have shifted from what to do about the town to who gets to leave first, said Ed Keheley, a retired nuclear engineer on the board of the trust in charge of the buyout.

"They want out as soon as they can get out. They want out tomorrow," he said.

Keheley recently moved back to northeast Oklahoma. He grew up in Picher and never expected to play a role in wiping away his hometown. "It's a sad but necessary step," he said.

Effort to split a county raises racial tension

Wealthy Atlanta suburbs would break away from poorer, mainly black areas of Fulton County.

The Associated Press

ATLANTA | A potentially explosive dispute is taking shape in the City Too Busy to Hate.

It involves a proposal to break Fulton County in two and split off Atlanta's predominantly white, affluent suburbs to the north from some of the metropolitan area's poorest black neighborhoods.

Legislation that would allow the suburbs to form their own

county, to be called Milton County, was introduced by members of the Georgia Legislature's Republican majority earlier this month.

Supporters say it is a quest for more responsive government in a county with a population greater than that of six states. Opponents say the measure is racially motivated and will pit white against black, rich against poor.

"If it gets to the floor, there will be blood on the walls," warned state Sen. Vincent Fort, an Atlanta Democrat and member of the Legislative Black Caucus. Fort added: "As

much as you would like to think it's not racial, it's difficult to draw any other conclusion."

The legislation calls for amending the Georgia Constitution to allow the return of Milton County, which succumbed to financial troubles in the Depression and was folded into Fulton County in 1932.

The former Milton County is now mostly white and Republican and one of the nation's most affluent areas. Atlanta and its southern suburbs are mostly black, are controlled by Democrats and have neighborhoods with some of the highest poverty rates in America.

"The only way to fix Fulton County is to dismantle Fulton County," said state Rep. Jan Jones, the plan's chief sponsor. "It's too large, and certainly too dysfunctional, to truly be considered local government."

About 25 miles to the south in downtown Atlanta, the Rev. J. Allen Milner said he is afraid the tax revenue loss would have a devastating effect on those who need government help the most.

"If you take that money out of their coffers, human services will suffer greatly," said Milner, a black church pastor who runs a homeless mission.

THE BUZZ

Who's covering tracks?

More on the false report that Sen. Barack Obama, a Christian, was

making remarks about Nancy Pelosi's speakership, the president congratulates the 'Democrat majority' — words most every Democrat takes as

Just like clockwork

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, Texas Democrat, claimed her favorite seat